
Cruel Cut: Parliament Passes Bill To Annul Unemployment Benefits

By GAYANE MKRTCHYAN
ArmeniaNow - 24/10/2013

The National Assembly has passed a bill by first hearing annulling the unemployment benefit system, which implies that since January 1 the government will no longer pay the monthly 18,000 drams' (\$45) unemployment benefits.

Introducing the law on Employment, Republican Hakob Hakobyan, chairing the committee on social welfare, said it is "immoral to give 18,000 drams' benefit to citizens".

"Rather than giving money and saying goodbye, we have given you your money, now go away, but we have to offer real help with education, direct funding, direct advice, direct employment chances," he said.

Prosperous Armenia Party member Naira Zohrabyan takes as an offense the claim that people give up work when they get unemployment benefits.

"There are no workplaces, no jobs, and to say 'let us cut the unemployment benefit and direct that to training people' is not serious. We have wonderful professionals, scholars, scientists who are today, sorry to say this, in retail business, working as street or market vendors. The inflated budget draft that's been submitted is a balloon, a myth that can never be brought to life, hence they are simply trying to cut that expenditure," says Zohrabyan.

Official statistics show more than 70,000 unemployed registered in the country, 10,000 among whom receive 18,000 drams' benefit.

Heritage's Zaruhi Postanjyan says the budget has its last means left, more than a million people in the country are famished.

"This is the consequence of this criminal policy we have been unable to get rid of for years now," she said.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun MP Artsvik Minasyan, terming the bill as strictly unsatisfactory, says depriving people of unemployment benefits breaches the European Social Charter. The government is eliminating several programs, not offering anything to its unemployed citizens. He says he believes the state is playing a trick to show international structures another official statistics by which Armenia will have five percent unemployment, when in reality it will be twenty percent.

"How can we benefit from it? Together we have to think how to reduce the emigration rates by offering employment opportunities. We cannot stop emigration if things remain as they are. We talk about the demographic crisis, while families with children have to be first of all engaged in employment projects. "This program suggests nothing of the kind. They [the authorities] can claim now that they'll do it later, but I do not believe. I don't trust the feasibility of anything that's to be left for the government to implement," said Minasyan.

He says the draft law has to suggest economic, tax and financial solutions, which the submitted document lacks, meaning that no progress can be ensured in the sphere.

"The government has submitted a program on creating a hundred thousand workplaces, consequently we can now predict the directions in which those jobs will be created, and how that issue will be solved. Rather than ceasing to exist, like now they are trying to deprive the unemployed of their benefits by this bill, employment projects have to develop active plans, and a lot of them, to gradually replace the passive, ineffective ones," says Minasyan.

Parallel to the draft law cancelling the unemployment benefit, the parliament discussed another bill by which the RA president's, parliament speaker's and prime-minister's salaries should be raised.

Comparing the two bills, Armenian National Congress MP Nikol Pashinyan said: "We were discussing the employment law and there were eleven lawmakers present in the session hall. As soon as we got to the salary bill, the hall suddenly got crowded. We have adopted the disgrace of a bill on cancelling the 18,000 drams benefit, and now with serious faces are discussing the issue of raising the president's and the premier's salaries."

http://www.armenianow.com/society/49479/armenia_unemployment_benefits_cut
